

# Article 3

## Citizens and the Council

### Introduction

**This Article sets out what citizens can expect from the Council and the responsibilities that come with these rights.**

### 3.01 Citizens' Rights

Citizens have the following rights. Their rights to information and to participate are explained in more detail in the Access to Information Procedure Rules in Part 4 of this Constitution.

#### (a) Voting and Mayoral Petitions

Citizens on the electoral roll for the area have the right to vote.

Citizens may also sign a petition requesting a referendum for an elected Mayor.

#### (b) Information

Citizens have the right to:

- (i) attend meetings of the Council and its committees except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting is therefore held in private;
- (ii) attend meetings of the Executive except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting is therefore held in private;
- (iii) find out from the Key Decision Schedule what Key Decisions will be taken by the Executive and when;
- (iv) see agendas, reports and background papers, and any records of decisions made by the Council and the Executive (subject to confidential and exempt information not being disclosed);
- (v) obtain a copy of the Council Constitution; and
- (vi) inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.

They will also have rights under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Council produced a Publication Scheme telling people about their rights under the Freedom of Information Act in February 2003.

### **(c) Participation**

The Council is keen to promote community participation in local issues. The Harrow Partnership provides a platform for joint work between the Council and local community groups, to improve life in the Borough. Specific areas of joint work include those with the voluntary sector, young people, housing and tenants' organisations, older people, local businesses, and other public services like the police and health agencies and the Residents' Panel.

Citizens also have the right to participate in Council business in the following ways:

- by asking questions of decision makers at meetings;
- by presenting petitions at meetings of the Council, its committees and the Executive;
- by making deputations to committees of the Council and to Advisory Panels of the Executive;
- by contributing to investigations by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny sub-committees of the Council;
- by participating in any public sessions.

### **(d) Complaints**

Citizens have the right to complain to:

- (i) their ward Councillors or Members of the Executive about any Council service;
- (ii) the Council about any Council service under the complaints scheme;
- (iii) the Ombudsman after using the Council's own complaints scheme;
- (iv) the Standards Committee if they have evidence which they think shows that a Councillor has not followed the Members' Code of Conduct.

### **3.02 Citizens' Responsibilities**

Harrow citizens are encouraged to make full use of their roles both as voters and members of the community. In particular by:

- ❑ voting in local, London, Parliamentary and European elections;
- ❑ respecting the expression of differing opinions in public debate;
- ❑ promoting tolerance and respect between their fellow citizens;
- ❑ meeting their obligations in relation to the Council, such as paying their council tax, making sure their children attend school, making sure rubbish is disposed of properly, following the dog owners' code in relation to keeping parks and streets cleaner;
- ❑ individually and collectively seeking information about the decision-making role of Councillors; and
- ❑ respecting the Council procedures which give effect to representative democracy.

Citizens must not be violent, abusive or threatening to Councillors or officers and must not wilfully harm things owned by the Council, Councillors or officers.